Iceberg Idea

Study Abroad Training

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2018-2025

Culture is the characteristic features of behavior and everyday life within a social group.

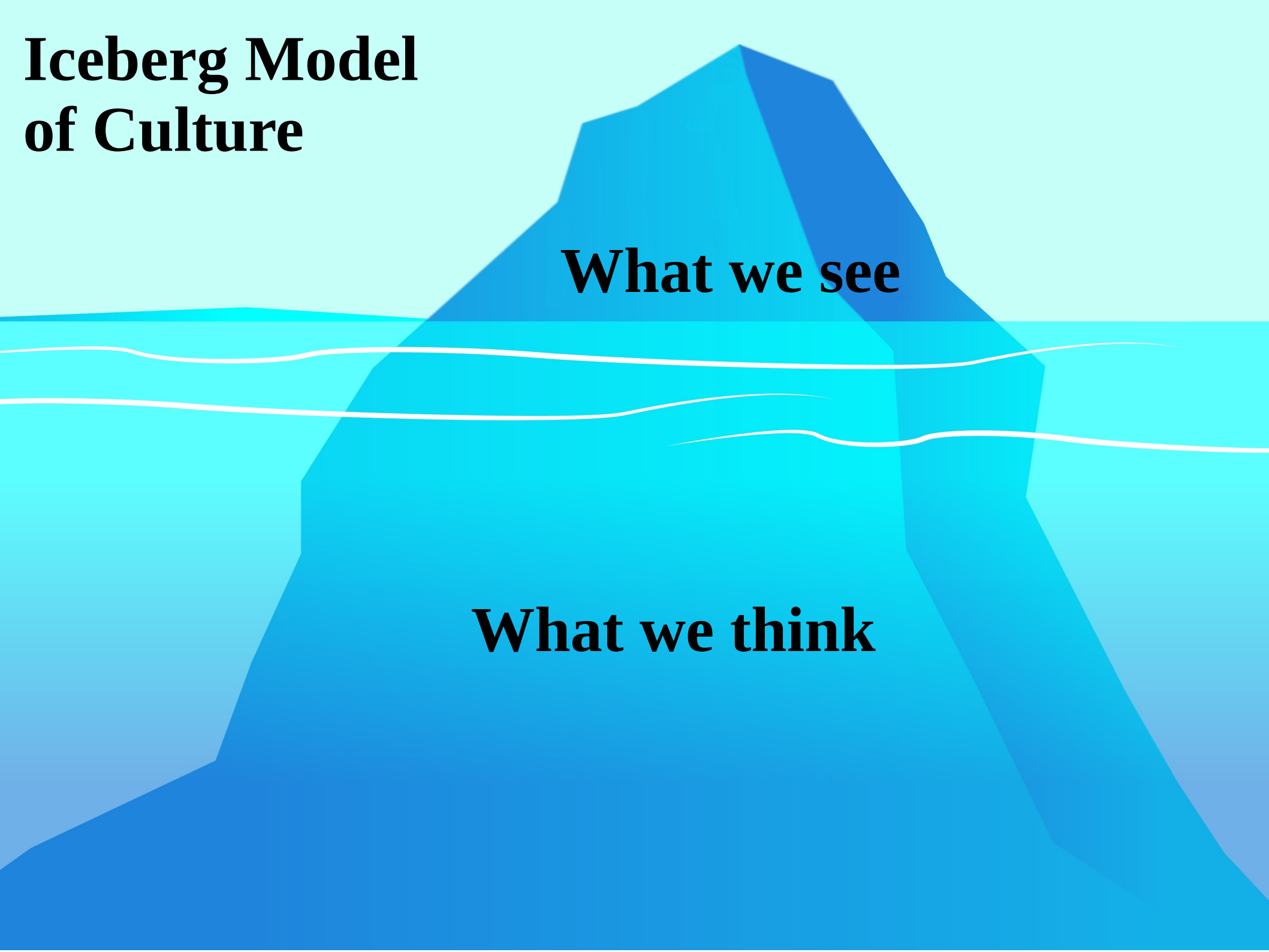
What are some examples of culture in your country? Your region? Your school?

Monks in Bangkok

Piano in Manhattan.

Greenland Man. Picture from Citi.io.

Iceberg Model of Culture



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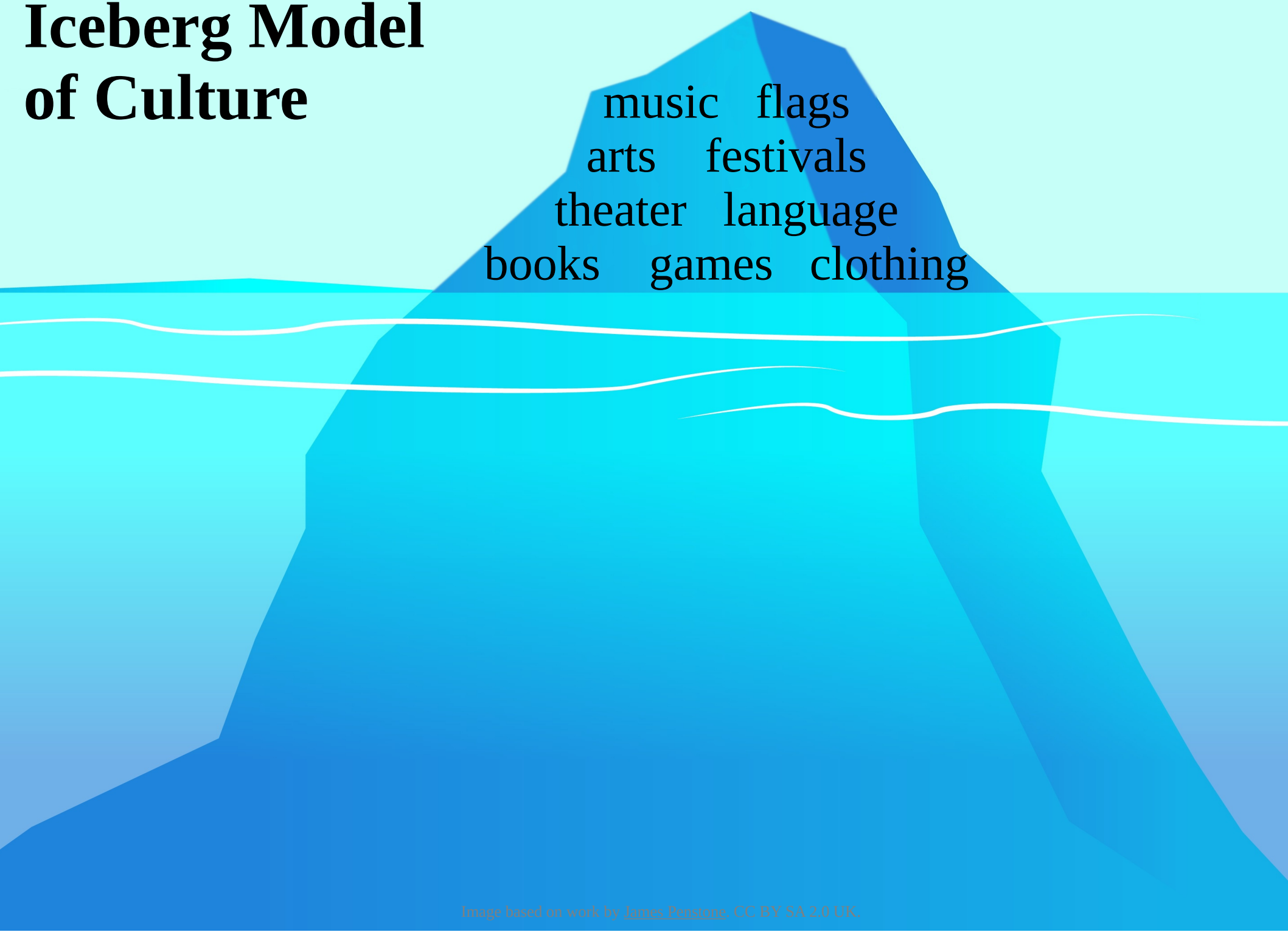
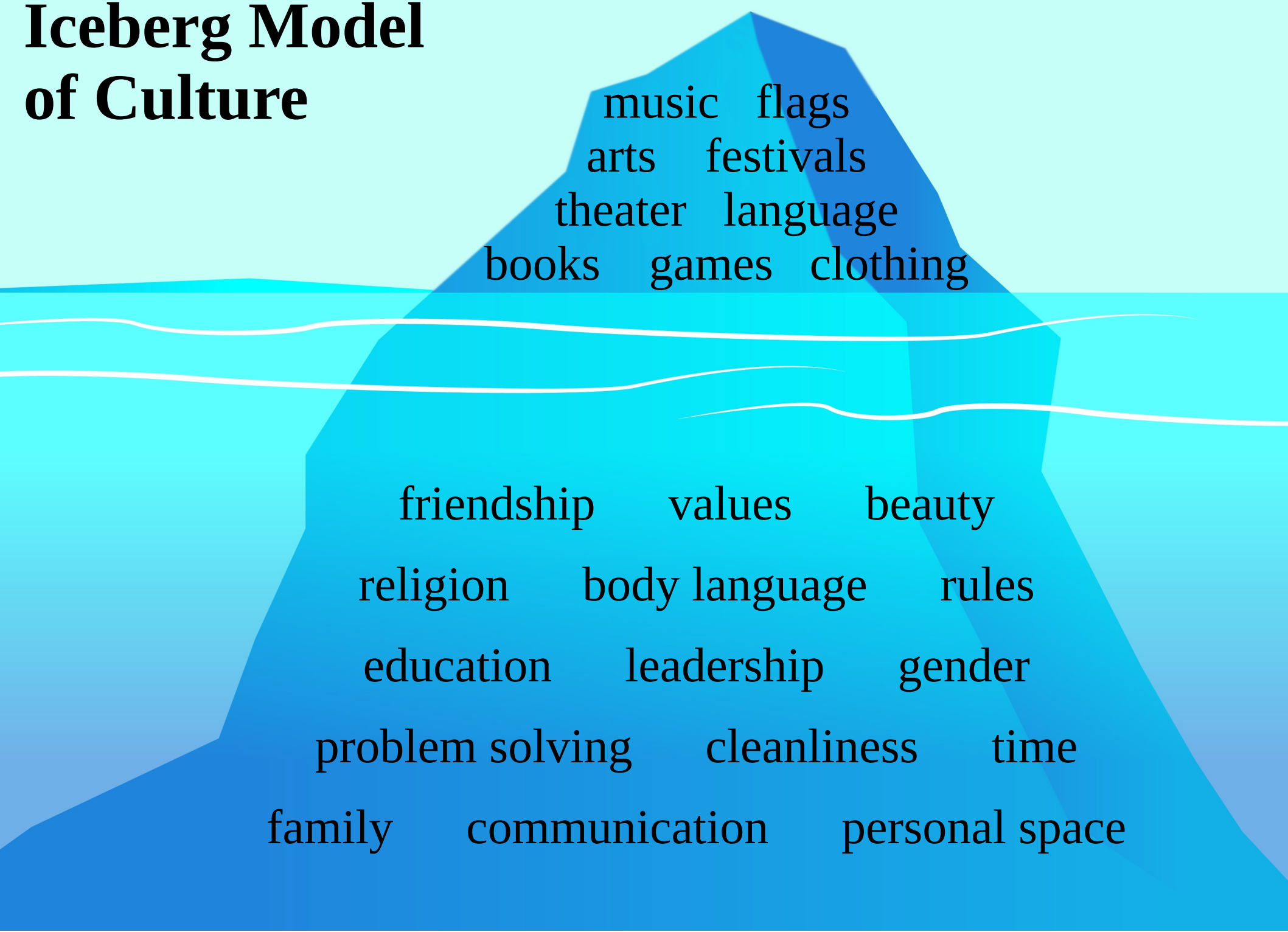


Image based on work by James Penstone. CC BY SA 2.0 UK.

Iceberg Model of Culture



Some ways to describe cultures:

1) Individual or group
2) Relaxed or strict time
3) Direct or indirect communication

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Individual – You think of yourself first. Independence is important.

Group – Your team is important. The people around you keep you safe.

Individual vs. Group

For each sentence, does it describe a culture that is centered on individuals or on groups?

Individual vs. Group

1. People love tradition.
2. It’s good to be different.
3. The best workers get bonuses.
4. Parents choose their children’s careers.
5. Work to make the team happy.
6. People change jobs a lot.
7. Don’t embarrass your classmate.
8. Working alone is the best.

Individual vs. Group

1. People love tradition. **G**
2. It’s good to be different. **I**
3. The best workers get bonuses. **I**
4. Parents choose their children’s careers. **G**
5. Work to make the team happy. **G**
6. People change jobs a lot. **I**
7. Don’t embarrass your classmates. **G**
8. Working alone is the best. **I**

Some of these could be both.

Surprising Stories

Sometimes you do something that feels normal to you, but other people react as though you did something strange. It could be a word, gesture, or action. The situation gets weird, but you don’t know why.

Let’s look at some real examples of American college students abroad. Can you guess what happened?

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Scotland Incident

(U.S. Exchange Coordinator) The Scottish exchange program coordinator had recruited host families for 20 American students arriving in Glasgow for the summer. He told them how good the students were and that it would be a fun summer for everyone. Halfway through the summer, he called me in the U.S. to say that the students were so unfriendly that many host families were angry. A major problem was that the students would not say “thank you”.

Adapted from What's Up with Culture from the School for International Studies at University of the Pacific.

Scotland Explained

(U.S. Exchange Coordinator) The next week, I went to Scotland and was staying with the Scottish coordinator. I was upstairs when they asked if I wanted tea. I replied, “No, not right now.” When I came downstairs, they told me I was very rude. They explained that in Glasgow, when tea is offered, the response should always be, “Thank you, no” or “Thank you, yes.” This is why they were upset with the American students.

Created by Addicted04. CC BY-SA 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spain_on_the_globe_(Spain_centered).svg

Spain Incident

(Male, 21 years old) I was invited for dinner by a bunch of Spanish guys I had just met. I was told to meet them at 8pm at a bar. I got there and we started to have drinks. I was busy that day and had skipped lunch and was starving. After about an hour, I asked when we were going to eat. They all looked at me strangely and said, “Our reservation is in two hours!” What was going on?

Adapted from What's Up with Culture from the School for International Studies at University of the Pacific.

Spain Explained

(Male, 21 years old) I thought that the 8pm meeting time was also the “dinner time”, not three long hours of talking and drinking. In Spain, they generally eat very late hours compared with Americans, and Spaniards often have a late afternoon snack to fill their stomachs until a relaxing dinner between 9PM and midnight!

If you live abroad long enough, you’re going to have an experience like one of these. It might be dramatic or uncomfortable. Remember to share your stories with friends later.

Culture Reading

What is your favorite local festival?

(Amber) My favourite national festival is **Vivid Festival** in Sydney, Australia. Every year in May, the whole city of Sydney gets decorated with lights, music, and fireworks to celebrate arts, music and culture. The festival lasts for about one month, and over 2 million people visit and celebrate! Seeing buildings like the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge lit up with colourful lights is amazing! My favourite part of the festival is watching the beautiful fireworks.

Do you have friends with different religious views?

(Geff) Since I'm from the Philippines, a culturally diverse country, I have a lot of friends that have different religious views. The majority of people in the Philippines are Roman Catholic, and so are most of my friends. I am a Philippine Catholic, which is a little different. Also, I have neighbors who practice Buddhism, and I have even joined their prayer sessions twice or thrice. Despite our differences, we have great relationships with each other, simply because we choose to respect and love one another.

Is it important to learn traditional cooking?

(Douglas) I live abroad, and cooking food that I ate growing up makes me feel normal and happy. It's a reminder of where I came from, and who I am, so I definitely value traditional cooking. Also, my great grandmother and some other relatives helped write *The Fanny Farmer Cookbook*, and it's fun to use recipes that have been passed down for generations. Some of my favorite recipes are for sweets: pound cake, pineapple upside-down cake, and apple crisp.

Are men and women mostly the same?

(Janelle) I believe that men and women are mostly different. Growing up with a single mother and grandmother meant that I was surrounded by strong women from a young age. This has impacted my views on women. Women tend to be more emotionally intelligent than men. They are more likely to understand the feelings of others. Women tend to grow up with a lot of expectations and stereotypes around what is ‘expected’ of a woman. While there are also ‘typical’ roles for men, I feel these are less dominant than those faced by women.

Culture Writing

Answer 4+ questions.

1.What is your favorite local or national festival?

2.Describe an interesting foreign festival or holiday.

3.Do you have friends with different religious views?

4.Do you wear any traditional clothing?

5.Do you think it’s important to learn traditional cooking?

6.If you have no money, where would you hang out with friends?

7.Some say, “People in Japan are very polite.” Do you agree?

8.Are men and women mostly the same, or mostly different?

See Also

- Cultural Iceberg. GCPE BCGov. JTST-SDSI Immigrant Employment Collaboration Project 2016, Training Module 2. 2016.
- Individualist or Collectivist. Dr. Bruce La Brack. University of the Pacific. 2000-2003.
- The Geography of Thought. Richard E. Nisbett. 2003.
- Visualising the Iceberg Model of Culture. James Penstone. 2011.